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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 000326

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TAGS: [GM](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [IQ](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO GET MORE OUT OF GERMANY IN IRAQ

REF: BERLIN 325

Classified By: DCM JOHN KOENIG. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (SBU) Summary: German press and politicians have been responding with reluctant optimism to news of generally declining violence in Iraq over the past nine months. With this shift come fresh opportunities to engage Germany and increase German involvement with the Iraqi government, business, and civil society in ways that complement our strategic goals. It is hard for Embassy Berlin to judge from a distance how best to try and shape the nascent German openness on Iraq; we would appreciate guidance from the Department and Embassy Baghdad on areas where we should particularly encourage German -- or Iraqi -- engagement.

12. (SBU) While German coalition government dynamics limit Germany's ability to enact bold changes -- German "boots on the ground" in Iraq remains out of the question and the GOG will resist putting official Germans in harm's way -- some interesting new initiatives are in the works, including senior-level visits. Chancellor Merkel's invitation to Iraqi PM Maliki to visit Berlin may provide additional opportunities to engage with German policy makers and opinion multipliers. Another example is a planned official visit to Baghdad by German Bundestag member Elke Hoff -- a first by a parliamentarian since the start of hostilities in 2003. End Summary.

Media and Government Shift Toward Reluctant Optimism

13. (SBU) While the German press and the public remain critical of the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq, the media is beginning to reassess the current situation there. Major German newspapers have begun to note (sometimes begrudgingly) the improvements in security and economic development in Iraq. The tone of reporting in the mainstream press has become more reasoned and balanced than the negativity on Iraq that previously dominated. The Foreign Ministry as well has remarked in press briefings on the "convincing" progress in Iraq on security and stability (while noting the situation there is still "far from normal").

14. (C) Head of the MFA's Iraq Unit Ruediger Lotz reiterated this cautiously positive line to PolOff March 4 and noted that the political signals in Baghdad were a vast improvement, especially as reflected in the passage of several important pieces of legislation. If the implementation of these laws is a success, he said, than Germany will continue to look for other ways to be more engaged in supporting Iraq beyond what they already do (see REFTEL). Lotz noted, however, that at any one time there are

only three German diplomats and three support staff members in Iraq -- something he hopes to change.

Official Visits Helpful

15. (C) Mr. Lotz noted the GoG is interested in increasing outreach to the Iraqi government, but noted that the MFA currently has a ban on nearly all travel to Iraq because of ongoing security concerns and a lack of resources on the ground. That may change in the future, however, especially for visits to the more stable Kurdish north. Lotz listed Bundestag engagement as one of the reasons for increased efforts from his office to search for opportunities to increase support and assistance to Iraq. PolOff recommended that a visit to Iraq by FM Steinmeier could further this goal, and Lotz agreed to take this idea into consideration.

16. (C) The five-day visit in July 2007 to the Kurdish region by Bundestag members Claudia Roth and Winfried Nachtwei of the Green party provided an opportunity to highlight the need for increased German engagement in that area, according to Lotz. In discussing his report to the Bundestag following his visit, Nachtwei emphasized that the north of Iraq was "too important to be left just in the hands of the Americans." Green Party ideas for engagement include: additional humanitarian aid, especially regarding refugees; the creation of a conflict prevention center in Erbil; additional high-level trips to the North, and; expanded training, especially for police and security forces (albeit outside of Iraq). Most recently, on March 6, the Bundestag discussed a Green Party Caucus-sponsored resolution honoring the victims of the Saddam-era gassing of the Kurdish town of

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Halabja -- the introduction of which was a direct result of the Nachtwei/Roth visit.

17. (SBU) Among upcoming visits, Lotz mentioned that the Iraqi Minister for Industry will be visiting Berlin in June at the invitation of German Minister for Economics Michael Glos. The goal of the visit is to renegotiate a trade and cooperation agreement which dates from the Saddam era. Lotz also mentioned that Chancellor Merkel invited Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and FM Steinmeier invited the Iraqi Minister for Human Rights to visit Germany. Official responses have yet to be received by the GoG, however.

18. (U) Lotz also discussed plans by Bundestag Member Elke Hoff to visit Iraq in the coming weeks, saying that, while supportive of the visit in principle, Germany simply does not have the resources to provide security for such a high-level visitor on the ground. That is why Germany has an official ban on travel to Baghdad. Hoff, a proponent of many U.S. international efforts, is hoping to visit Iraq March 24-28 with two German journalists and an Iraqi-born businessman who lives in Berlin. She hopes to meet with Iraqi and Coalition officials as well as religious and ethnic leaders, among others. As a member of the Bundestag's Defense Committee, Hoff has urged a greater German role in international efforts to build stability and prosperity in post-conflict situations. She would be the first member of the German Bundestag to travel to central Iraq or to Baghdad since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime.

19. (C) COMMENT: The evolution in German views may make increased German engagement in Iraq possible in some instances. The current German government -- a centrist coalition of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats -- is increasingly fragile as Germany gears up for 2009 elections. And German public opinion remains supportive of then-Chancellor Schroeder's stance against the Iraq invasion. These factors rule out any German military presence in Iraq for the foreseeable future. But progress on economic engagement and reconstruction may be possible, and pressing Iraqi PM Maliki to visit could help re-engage the German

government. We should consider whether it is advisable to try to steer Maliki toward particular areas where Germany could be helpful. In particular, parliamentarian Elke Hoff's visit could help change the narrative within Germany on Iraq and provide the impetus for other key Bundestag members or officials to consider further engagement and German openness to support our efforts in Iraq. Post believes that such visits could positively affect German opinion at this critical juncture, when both the German press and public are open to a new message. END COMMENT.
TIMKEN JR